DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 889 CG 013 680

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TITLE The Optional Parenthood Questionnaire (and Clinician's Manual): A Guide to Decision-Making About Parenthood.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 36p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Alliance for Optional Parenthood, 2010 Massachusetts Ave, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adults; Birth; Child Rearing; *Children; *Decision Making; Individual Characteristics; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Child Relationship; *Parenthood Education; Parent Responsibility; *Self Evaluation; Social Factors; Spouses

ABSTRACT

This questionnaire is designed to assist those involved in the process of decision making regarding parenthood or helping professionals whose clients may be facing this decision. The focus of this booklet is on exploration of attitudes toward self, spouse, relatives, friends, and social norms, and is structured to enable the user to make intelligent decisions regrading potential parenthood. The booklet contains instructions for completing the instrument suggesting it be done three times to assess personal feelings, the impact of each issue on personal life and development, and whether the combination of the two gives positive or negative reinforcement toward having a child. Additionally, a clinician's manual is included with suggestions for instrument scoring and interpretation. (HLM)

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THE OPTIONAL PARENTHOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

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A Guide to Decision Making About Parenthood

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This booklet may help you decide whether or not to have a (another) child at this time in your life. It will help you to explore your attitudes about parenthood and to rationally consider the pros and cons of the many issues involved. If you have already made up your mind, it may support your decision or suggest that you reevaluate some areas. If you are uncertain about whether or not to have a child, the questionnaire may help you clarify the consequences of a positive or negative decision.

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Published by the
NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR OPTIONAL PARENTHOOD
3 N. Liberty Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

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Compiled with the assistance of Barbara Beach, Roberta Wood, and Ruth Komarnski. This questionnaire is not prescriptive; it is an aid to thinking about the multiple aspects of deciding about whether to have a child. The authors are not responsible for any but its intended use.

INSTRUCTIONS

To complete this questionnaire, go through it three times: Do Column A the first time, Column B the second time, and Column C the third time. *Think in terms of having or not having a (another) child in the near future, not in terms of childbearing in general.*

Instructions For Column A:

First read the numbered *subject* on the far left side of the page. Then read the paragraph on the far right side of the page to see what some people have thought about in relation to this subject. Do not limit yourself to the examples in the paragraph; *try to think about what things related to that subject mean to you personally.* Decide if your feelings and thoughts about that particular subject argue mostly for or mostly against having a (another) child. Then go to Column A and circle "for" if your feelings and thoughts are mostly in favor of having a child. If your feelings and thoughts about the subject are mostly against having a child, circle "against". If you do not feel strongly one way or the other, cross out the entire subject and all of the spaces related to it by drawing a line through all three columns.

For example, with the first subject, (Physical aspects: The physical effects of being pregnant and giving birth for the woman in your relationship or marriage) a man might decide that because his partner is in good health and looks beautiful when she is pregnant, although she does have some morning sickness, that *physically* it would be mostly good to have a child in the near future. He would circle "for". Another man might feel that a pregnant woman is ugly or be worried about his partner's health. He would circle "against" because he thinks that *physically* it is a bad idea for them to have a child in the near future.

Go through the entire questionnaire circling "for" when your thoughts and feelings about a subject argue mostly *for* having a (another) child, and circling "against" when they argue mostly *against* doing so. Then turn back here for instructions about how to fill in Column B.

Instructions For Column B:

After you have completed Column A go through the questionnaire again and decide *how great an impact* each of the subjects would have on your life, irrespective of whether you marked it "for" or "against". To do this, in Column B divide 10 points among the subjects on each page. If you feel that one subject would have a greater impact on you relative to the others then give it more points. The number of points for each subject should reflect your feelings about their relative impact on you. If you think a subject is completely irrelevant to you relative to the others, do not give it any points. You must, however, spend all 10 points on each page, even if it is all on only one subject.

At the end of each section of the questionnaire there are blanks for dividing another 10 points among the main subject categroies in that section according to how great an impact they would have overall on your life. And, at the end of the questionnaire there are blanks for dividing yet another 10 points among the three big parts of the questionnaire ("You and Your Partner", "Children", and "Others"). The purpose of these further divisions of points for the larger parts of the questionnaire is to allow you to say that some sections are more or less important to you; this allows you to make judgments about whole sections of the questionnaire rather than just about individual subjects and therefore to tell us more accurately how you feel.

Instructions For Column C:

After completing Column B go back through the questionnaire a third time and fill out Column C. For this, glance back over each subject and the accompanying examples and recall what things related to the subject are of personal importance to you and whether they are generally for or against your having a child. Then judge whether you think that those things would actually occur (and would indeed be as favorable or unfavorable as you think) were you to decide to have the child. If you think they would occur mark "Very likely" in Column C. If you do not think they would occur mark "Very Unlikely" in Column C. If you are unsure about whether they would occur or not mark "Uncertain" in Column C.

Part I
YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

A. AS PERSONS

	Column A Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*	Column B Divide 10 points among the 5 subjects to show the impact (either for or against) each would have on your life. The total must be 10.	Column C How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child? *Circle one.*	EXAMPLES These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.
1. Physical aspects: The physical effects of being pregnant and giving birth for the woman in your relationship or marriage.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [1] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people really enjoy the changes in women's bodies during pregnancy. The women often feel unusually healthy and attractive; they may be more beautiful to their partner. After childbirth they may have less menstrual discomfort. They may be pleased with increased breast size. *Against having a child:* Other women may be sick or get varicose veins, stretch marks, facial discoloration, or sagging breasts. Women may appear or feel fat, ugly, and unattractive. Medical complications may need surgery or, in rare cases, may even cause death.
2. Growth and maturity: The effects of having a child on your and/or your partner's development as mature persons.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [2] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people believe that having a child has made them grow up and be more mature by increasing their understanding of themselves and others. It may let them reproduce themselves or become a part of the future. *Against having a child:* Other people feel that having a child would keep them from growing personally. They may feel confined by a child and feel their flexibility would be limited. They might feel that spending years taking care of a child would keep them from growing and maturing.
3. Self-concept: The effects of a child on your feelings about yourself and/or your partner as persons.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [3] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people feel that unless they can have a child they are not really a total person. Some may want to prove to themselves that they can produce a normal, healthy child. *Against having a child:* For other people, their image of themselves does not include a need for a child. To them, the unpleasant or unsuccessful experiences they would have with a child would make them feel less of a person.
4. Genetic risk: The effects of having a child with an inherited defect on your feelings about yourself and/or your partner as persons.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [4] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people feel that many people run the risk of genetic defects and that it was just fate or "God's will" that caused it to be their child; they therefore feel no guilt or anger and accept the child and feel that they grow as a result of the experience. *Against having a child:* Other people react to having a child with an inherited defect by feeling guilty, angry with their partner and/or by having difficulties accepting the child.

5. Work and education:
The effects of having a child on your and/or your partner's work or education?

FOR

AGAINST

_____POINTS

_____
TOTAL
(10 points)

VERY LIKELY

UNCERTAIN [5]

UNLIKELY

For having a child: Some people feel that having a child would help with their work because it would improve their understanding of people.
Against having a child: Others feel that a child would prevent them from finishing school, etc. or interfere with their careers.

*(Numbers in boxes are for scorer's use.)

Part I
YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

Column A

Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*

Column B

Divide 10 points among the 4 subjects to show the impact (either for or against) each would have on your life. The total must be 10.

Column C

How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child? *Circle one.*

EXAMPLES

These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.

B. AS PARENTS

1. Caring for a child:
The effects of caring for, feeding, and being responsible for a child on you and your partner.

FOR
AGAINST

_____POINTS

VERY LIKELY
UNCERTAIN [6]
UNLIKELY

For having a child: Some people may get a special joy from holding, caring for a new baby, or from breast feeding. They may be pleased by the idea of a human life being completely dependent upon them for care. They may enjoy the cooperation between the parents in raising the child. Some women enjoy being homemakers and caring for children. *Against having a child:* Other people find child care boring and lonely, keeping them from adult companionship. Breast feeding may mean limiting activities because of feeding scedules or discomfort. Home tasks multiply with dirty diapers, spilled food and childhood illness. Some men prefer their partners to have a job rather than be homemakers. Some couples find areas of disagreement on child care which are difficult to settle.

2. Teaching and training a child:
The effects of helping to educate a child and helping the child to develop values on you and your partner.

FOR
AGAINST

_____POINTS

VERY LIKELY
UNCERTAIN [7]
UNLIKELY

For having a child: Some people enjoy sharing their special skills and interests with a child. They want to help a child to do well in school and leisure activities. They are eager to pass on their moral and religious values. *Against having a child:* Other people find it very difficult to communicate with a child. They don't have the patience, energy, or interest necessary to deal with an active, young child or a moody, unpredictable teenager. They are bored by a child's interests and can't or don't want to help with his or her formal education. Some people may not want the responsibility of teaching moral or religious values.

3. Living with a child:
The effects of sharing activities and doing things with a child on you and your partner.

FOR
AGAINST

_____POINTS

VERY LIKELY
UNCERTAIN [8]
UNLIKELY

For having a child: Some people find great satisfaction in watching their child's development. They may enjoy reliving with their children some activities they enjoyed as children. Some people choose recreation such as hiking, skiing, or boating which they can share with a child. Some people expect that by having a child, they will be sure of care and companionship in old age. *Against having a child:* Other people don't want the burden of taking a child along whenever they go somewhere or do something. They want to live their lives firsthand instead of having to watch out for a child. They don't think a child will take care of them in old age, or they don't want a child to have to take care of them.

4. A handicapped child:
The effects of having a child who is unhealthy, handicapped, or has an inherited defect on the relationship between you and your partner.

FOR

AGAINST

_____POINTS

_____
TOTAL
(10 points)

VERY LIKELY

UNCERTAIN [9]

UNLIKELY

For having a child: Some people find that an unhealthy or handicapped child or a child with an inherited defect strengthens their relationship with their partner. ***Against having a child:*** Others find that the stresses and responsibilities of an unhealthy or handicapped child or a child with an inherited defect weaken their relationship with their partner.

Part I
YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

	Column A	Column B	Column C	EXAMPLES
	Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*	**Divide 10 points among the 4 subjects to show the impact (either for or against) each would have on your life. The total must be 10.**	**How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child?** *Circle one.*	**These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.**
C. AS A FAMILY				
1. Material well-being: The effects of the cost of having and raising a child on your family.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [10] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people may think that having a child is a long range investment, a source of financial security in their own old age. They might expect the child to do chores around the house that will, in part, pay for the child's support. *Against having a child:* Other people consider a child an immediate and long-term financial drain with no return. Some of the expenses, beyond the cost of the pregnancy and delivery, would include 18 years or more of food, clothing, housing, medical needs, education, and recreation. Increased wear and tear could be added to the initial cost for furniture and housing. They might prefer to spend their money in other ways.
2. Non-material well-being: The effects of having a child on your and your partner's life style, freedom, and general enjoyment of life.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [11] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* For some people, having a child is also a decision to "put down roots" and become involved in the community. They want to share mutual interests and activities with other couples who are also establishing their homes. They enjoy the atmosphere of a home with children's activities and friends. *Against having a child:* Other people prefer a more adult atmosphere. For some people, having a child may mean giving up their freedom and spontaneity. Some people may not want to have a child because it would limit the time and energy they have for other activities they value.
3. Partner's desire for a child: The effects of how your partner would feel about having a child.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [12] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* This is a rather special question. If your partner wants to have a child circle "for" in Column A. *Against having a child:* If your partner does not want a child circle "against" in Column A. Later, in Column B you will be able to indicate how important your partner's opinion is in influencing your own feelings about having a child. Then, in Column C you can indicate how likely it is that you have correctly judged what your partner wants.

4. Your relationship:
The effects of having a child on your relationship with your partner.

FOR

AGAINST

_____POINTS

_____
TOTAL
(10 points)

VERY LIKELY

UNCERTAIN [13]

UNLIKELY

For having a child: Some people feel that having a child will increase the commitment they feel toward their relationship. They consider the child a product of their love for their partner and the fulfillment of their sexual relationship. *Against having a child:* Other people feel that they will have less time to spend with their partner after having a child. Being limited to child care might make one of them less interesting and attractive to the other. Trying to become pregnant may cause a lessening of sexual pleasure if sex has to be scheduled as opposed to being spontaneous.

Divide 10 points among the three parts of "You and Your Partner" to show the potential impact of each on your life if you were to have a child. The total for all parts must be 10 points. *NOTE: Each part must receive at least 1 point.*

YOU AND YOUR PARTNER . . .

Column B

A. As persons _____POINTS [14]

B. As parents _____POINTS [15]

C. As a family _____POINTS [16]

_____
TOTAL
(10 points)

Part II
CHILDREN

	Column A	Column B	Column C	EXAMPLES
	Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*	**Divide 10 points among the 3 subjects to show the impact (either for or against) each would have on your life. The total must be 10.**	**How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child?** *Circle one.*	**These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.**
A. IN YOUR FAMILY				
1. Family size: The effects of having a child on the family size you think to be best for you.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN 17 UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people think that there is an ideal family size for them and want additional children to achieve that ideal size. *Against having a child:* Other people either don't see themselves as having children at all or as having already achieved their ideal family size and not wanting more children.
2. Sexes of your children: The effects of having a child of the "right" or "wrong" sex on your feelings about the child.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN 18 UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people favor having a (another) child because they particularly want a boy or particularly want a girl but would accept either sex happily. *Against having a child:* Other people feel that if the child turned out to be of the "wrong" sex they would have difficulty accepting the child or would feel negatively about themselves or their partner.
3. Your ages: The effects of having a child in the near future in relation to you and/or your partner being the proper ages to be a parent and, perhaps later, a grandparent.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN 19 UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people want to have a first child early enough for them to complete their family before they or their partner reaches a certain age (for instance, before the female reaches age 35 or so). They may consider how old they may be when a child leaves home or if they become grandparents. *Against having a child:* Some people feel that they are too old to raise a (another) child while others feel that they are too young.
		_____ TOTAL (10 points)		

Part II
CHILDREN

B. WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN

	Column A Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*	Column B Divide 10 points among the 3 subjects to show the impact (either for or against) each would have on your life. The total must be 10.	Column C How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child? *Circle one.*	EXAMPLES These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.
1. Brother-sister relationships: The effects of having a child on your present children (if you have any).	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [20] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people consider the good effects of an additional child on present children; perhaps to provide a playmate or to assure family ties when the children are adults. Too, if they have a child they feel that another one will prevent the first from becoming "spoiled." *Against having a child:* Other people feel that another child would disrupt their family so that the children would have a harder time getting along with each other and that as parents they would have to spread thin their love and attention with respect to their children.
2. Health of child: The effects of having an unhealthy or handicapped child on your present or future children (if any).	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [21] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people feel that, while it is unfortunate, an ill or handicapped child pulls a family together and that this can be a valuable experience for the other children. *Against having a child:* Other people think that an unhealthy or handicapped child would take a lot of time and effort on the part of all of the members of the family, particularly the parents, and that the healthy children would suffer as a result.
3. Society and the child: The effects of educational, social, or political states of the world on a child now and in the future.	FOR AGAINST	_____POINTS _____ TOTAL (10 points)	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [22] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people think that things are better now than at any previous time in history and that the future looks bright too. Americans, at least, are healthier, wealthier, better educated, etc. and a (another) child would probably share in all of this. *Against having a child:* Other people are concerned with the potential for war, overpopulation, political unrest, and pollution problems and do not think the world is a very good place into which to bring a child.

Divide 10 points between the two parts of "Children" to show the potential impact of each on your life if you were to have a child. The total for all parts must be 10 points.
NOTE: Each part must receive at least 1 point.

CHILDREN . . .	Column B	
A. In your family	_____POINT	[23]
B. Well-being of children	_____POINT	[24]
	_____ TOTAL (10 points)	

Part III
OTHER PEOPLE

A. RELATIVES

1. Getting along with relatives:
The effects of having a child on your and/or your partner's relationship with relatives.

2. Family traditions:
The effects of having a child on your and/or your partner's carrying on of family traditions and/or religious values.

Column A	Column B	Column C
Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*	**Divide 10 points among the 2 subjects to show the impact (either for or against) each would have on your life. The total must be 10.**	**How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child?** *Circle one.*
FOR	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY
AGAINST		UNCERTAIN 25
		UNLIKELY
FOR	_____POINTS	VERY LIKELY
AGAINST		UNCERTAIN 26
	_____ TOTAL (10 points)	UNLIKELY

EXAMPLES

These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.

For having a child: Some people feel that having a child will bring them closer to their own parents, brothers, or sisters. *Against having a child:* Other people think that having a child will result in conflict with their relatives.

For having a child: Family traditions are important to some people. They may wish to have a family like the one they grew up in. They may want to be sure that the family name is passed on to future generations. Some feel religious values dictate having large, close-knit families. *Against having a child:* Other people don't find family traditions important. Some feel that they do not want to have a child because their own childhood was unpleasant and they do not want to repeat their own parents' mistakes.

Part III
OTHER PEOPLE

	Column A	Column B	Column C	EXAMPLES
	Do your feelings about this subject argue in favor of (for) or not in favor of (against) having a (another) child? *Circle one.*	**Because there is only one subject for part B and one for part C, each gets an automatic 10 points.**	How likely is it that the things you think of in this subject actually would occur if you were to have a child? *Circle one.*	**These are examples of what some people have thought about the subjects on the left. Don't be limited by the examples, but think of what you feel and what is important to you.**
B. FRIENDS				
The effects of having a child on your relationships with your friends.	FOR AGAINST	10 POINTS 10 TOTAL (10 points)	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [27] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people think that having a child helps cement their relationships with their friends; they will have more in common with friends and will be able to share more activities with them. *Against having a child:* Some people think that they may be left out of activities by friends after they have a child or if they have another young baby and/or that they will have to look for new friends who have similar families to their own.
C. SOCIETY				
The effects of a child on society in terms of population problems, pollution, and natural resources as well as in terms of having another capable member of society.	FOR AGAINST	10 POINTS 10 TOTAL (10 points)	VERY LIKELY UNCERTAIN [28] UNLIKELY	*For having a child:* Some people feel that having a child contributes to the stability of society. Some with exceptional abilities think that their child might contribute to the betterment of society. *Against having a child:* Others feel that having a (another) child will just contribute one more person to the already overloaded social, economic, and environmental systems that presently exist.

Divide 10 points between the three parts of "Other People" to show the potential impact of each on your life if you were to have a child. The total for all parts must be 10 points. *NOTE: Each part must receive at least 1 point.*

OTHER PEOPLE . . .

	Column B	
A. Relatives	_____POINTS	[29]
B. Friends	_____POINTS	[30]
C. Society	_____POINTS	[31]
	TOTAL (10 points)	

22-A

22-B

Finally, stop for a moment and think about all that is contained in the three large sections of this questionnaire:

I – You and Your Partner (As persons, as parents, and as a family)

II – Children (Family composition and the well-being of your children)

III – Other People (Relatives, friends, and society)

Divide 10 points among the three sections to show the potential impact of each on your life if you were to have a child. The total must be 10 points. *NOTE: Each section must receive at least 1 point.*

	Column B	
I – You and Your Partner	_____POINTS	32
II – Children	_____POINTS	33
III – Other	_____POINTS	34
	_____ TOTAL (10 points)	

SCORING WORKSHEET
Part 1

See CLINICIAN'S MANUAL for scoring and interpretation instructions.

Item number	A + or -	B Points	C Likelihood	D Product	E Weights	F Positive answers	G Negative answers
1	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ a	= ____	____
2	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ a	= ____	____
3	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ a	= ____	____
4	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ a	= ____	____
5	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ a	= ____	____
6	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ b	= ____	____
7	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ b	= ____	____
8	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ b	= ____	____
9	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ b	= ____	____
10	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ c	= ____	____
11	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ c	= ____	____
12	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ c	= ____	____
13	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ c	= ____	____
17	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ d	= ____	____
18	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ d	= ____	____
19	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ d	= ____	____
20	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ e	= ____	____
21	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ e	= ____	____
22	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ e	= ____	____
25	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ f	= ____	____
26	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ f	= ____	____
27	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ g	= ____	____
28	____	____	X ____	= ____	X ____ h	= ____	____
						SUM Col. F	SUM Col. G

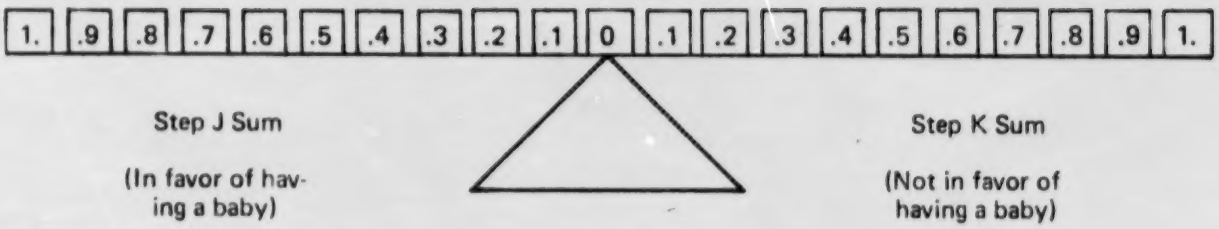
SCORING WORKSHEET
Part 2

H Column F Altered	I Column G Altered

Part 5

Decision Maker's Name _____

Date _____ Scorer _____



To the Decision Maker:

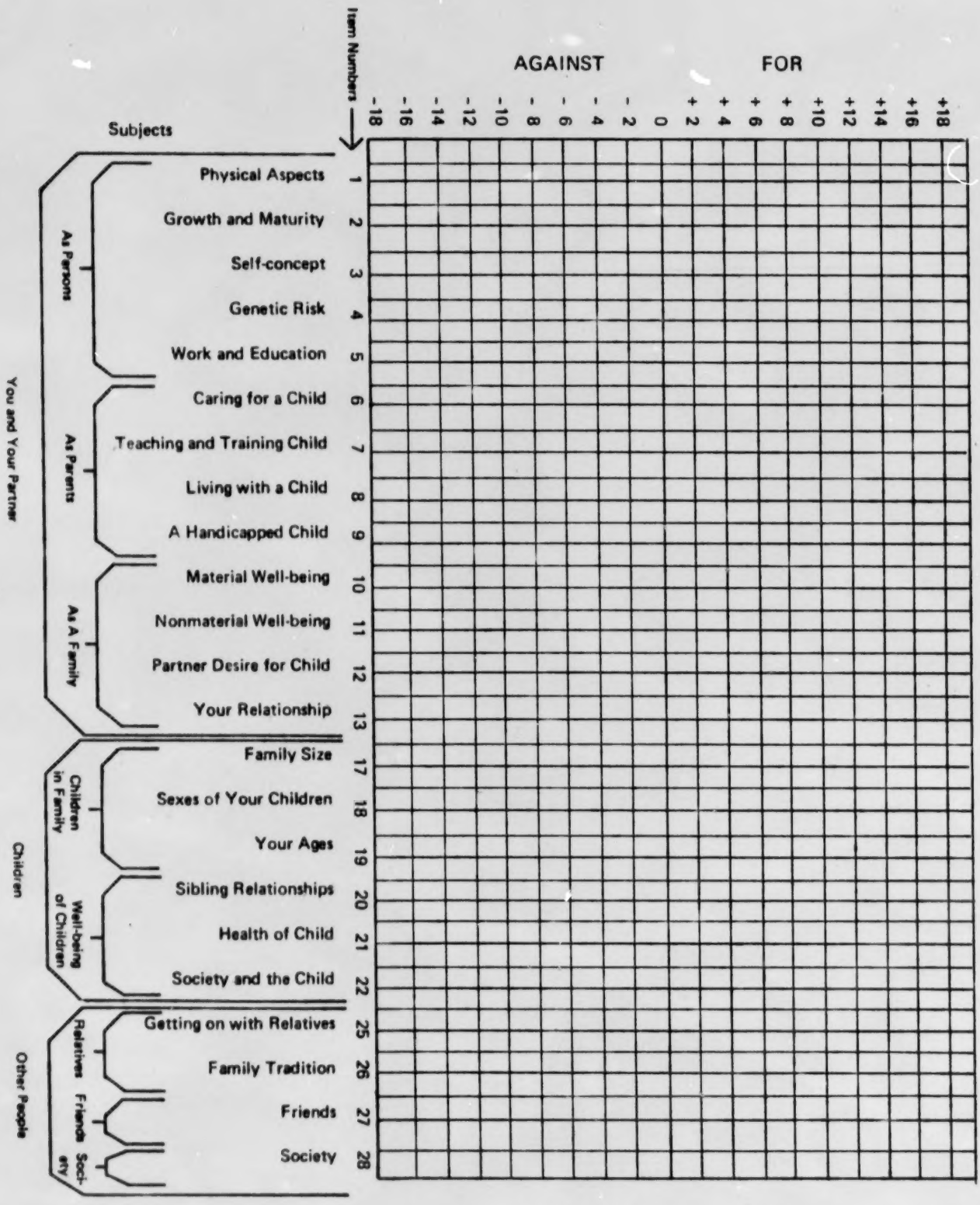
The locations of the weights on the Balance Scale and the graph on the Profile that is on the next page represent the logical results of how you evaluated the various subjects and their categories in the questionnaire. As such they are only as good as your answers were. They cannot replace your own good sense in deciding about whether or not to have a (another) child. Instead, they merely can help you make that decision by summarizing your thoughts and feelings about what is, after all, a very complex decision.

Look over the Profile and see if the highs and lows correspond to how you feel. If they do, the Balance Scale represents the logical implications of those feelings. If the Profile looks incorrect to you it may be best to go back to the relevant parts of the questionnaire and reconsider your answers. Then, after corrections are made, the Profile and Balance Scale should reflect more accurately how you feel and be a better aid for your decision.

Part 6

Decision Maker's Name _____

Date _____ Scorer _____



THE CLINICIAN'S MANUAL

For Use with

THE OPTIONAL PARENTHOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

A Guide to Decision Making About Parenthood

by Lee Roy Beach, Brenda D. Townes, and Frederick L. Campbell, Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195.

Published by the
NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR OPTIONAL PARENTHOOD
3 N. Liberty Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Colleague:

I'm honored to write this letter of endorsement for the Optional Parenthood Questionnaire (OPQ). The authors, Drs. Lee Roy Beach, Brenda D. Townes and Frederick L. Campbell are to be congratulated for the extensive effort and rigorous methodology they have applied in developing the OPQ. I've been privileged to have had my recommendations considered by the authors and their spirit of openness to suggestions has been a refreshing experience.

As a clinician I've often seen the product of children who were (are) not wanted. The casualties are the child, the parents, and society as a whole. My training did not lend itself to providing preventative measures for human behavior; training was oriented toward treating the casualties. This questionnaire is a tool for the clinician to be used as one means to help people reach a decision; the decision being whether or not to have a (or another) child. I believe this is the most important decision a person can make. The outcome affects individuals personally, socially, and economically; it affects the society in which we live. To help people arrive at a decision, examine the consequences of the alternatives, to be aware of their own thoughts and feelings about the factors involved in the decision is indeed a preventative program that can help reduce the incidence of emotional disturbance related to unwanted children.

I hope that all clinicians in mental health will include the OPQ as one of the assessment tools to be used when appropriate. It can provide a learning experience for the client and assist the clinician in his or her efforts to be responsive to the total needs of the person with whom he or she works.

John C. Wolfe, Ph.D.
Executive Director
National Council of Community Mental Health Centers

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Compiled with the assistance of Barbara Beach, Roberta Wood, and Ruth Komarnski. This questionnaire is not prescriptive; it is an aid to thinking about the multiple aspects of deciding about whether to have a child. The authors are not responsible for any but its intended use.

INTRODUCTION

The Optional Parenthood Questionnaire has been devised to help in the process of decision making. A principle of modern psychology is that complex decision problems must be broken down into small manageable cognitive units in order to be coped with effectively. When people learn to examine these units in relation to their feelings about them and to rationally consider the pros and cons, they have the potential for making effective, satisfying decisions.

The decision about whether or not to have a (another) child is complex because there are many issues and one is not always sure how one feels about each of them, and because the decision has far-reaching implications for one's own life, the life of one's partner, the lives of present and/or future children, and the life of the child in question. For example, the decision to have or not to have a (another) child has serious economic implications that effect all members of a family. Many people have difficulty coming to grips with all of this and find themselves unable to make a decision in which they have confidence and a feeling of certainty.

As a clinician you can use the questionnaire and the results to help your clients think about the issues involved and to consider (1) whether they favor having a (another) child or not having a (another) child, (2) how important each issue is in relation to related issues, and (3) how likely the issues are to occur if they decide to have a child soon. Any decision is subject to change based on such factors as new information, change in the environmental conditions, age, etc.; this questionnaire can only reflect what an individual or couple feels and thinks at a given time, the time of testing.

The scoring system is complex but if you follow the steps carefully the scores will help you summarize for your client all that he/she has said in response to the questionnaire so he/she can identify and assess his/her attitudes and feelings in terms of the decision to have or not to have a (another) child. The results also can be used to discuss the client's feelings and thoughts with his/her partner; this may well be the first time the couple has taken the time to clarify their perceptions and to mutually share them. In short, this questionnaire is a tool to help you, the clinician, help people make what may well be one of the most important decisions in their lives.

Additional copies of Scoring Manual and Questionnaires available from: NAOP, 3 N. Liberty Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21201:

Manual	–	$3.00 each	
Questionnaire	–	Single copy	– $ 1.25
		Package of 10	– 9.00
		Package of 25	– 18.00
		Package of 100	– 64.50

SCORING AND INTERPRETATION INSTRUCTIONS

The form of the questionnaire and its scoring procedure derive from Mathematical Decision Theory. In order to make a rational decision it is necessary to examine the available courses of action and select the one that potentially will yield the greatest good. That is, each course of action must be evaluated in terms of its potential positively and negatively valued consequences and in terms of the probabilities that these consequences will actually occur should that course of action be selected. Decision Theory prescribes how these evaluations are to be summarized to yield an *expectation* for each course of action: The course of action with the most favorable expectation is the one that should be selected.

The difficulty with all of this, aside from the complex computations, is that important decisions usually involve courses of action that have numerous, diverse consequences. The result is that the decision maker focuses first on these consequences, and then on those, and then on yet others and never is able to get everything in perspective. A principle of modern psychology is that people are limited in their ability to keep very much in mind at any one time, and nowhere is this principle evidenced more clearly than in complex decision making.

To overcome this psychological limitation, decision researchers have devised ways of dividing decision problems into coherent, manageable subproblems that people can deal with. Then, the peoples' evaluations of these separate subproblems are mathematically recombined and used to derive the expectations that guide subsequent decision making.

The form of this questionnaire is dictated by the need to deal with the very complex problem of deciding about whether or not to have a (another) child. On each page the decision maker (client) differentially weights potential consequences of having a child in terms of how great an impact each consequence would have on his or her life and assigns a valence (+ or −) to represent whether the consequence argues for or against having the child. Then he or she indicates how probable it is that each consequence would occur should a child be born. Then subclasses of these consequences are themselves differentially weighted, and so on. The differential weighting scheme lets the client emphasize some consequences and deemphasize others so that their relative influence on the final calculated expectancy accords with their perceived importance. If the client answers the questions carefully, the final expectations are accurate summaries of the logical implications about the consequences of having or not having a (another) child.

At first glance the scoring procedure for the questionnaire looks formidable. Indeed, it is too complex for most clients to do on their own. If you are reasonably proficient with a calculator, however, and if you follow the directions carefully, you will find that it is fairly simple. Practice will reduce markedly the time required to score a questionnaire.

There are both positive and negative expectations associated with having a child (calculated in Part 1 of the worksheet). Similarly, there are positive and negative expectations associated with not having the child (calculated in Part 2).

The worksheet is constructed so that when you do the Balance Scale Computations you are, in fact, putting together all of the expectations that would argue *for* having the child from Part 1 and for *not* not having the child (follow that?) from Part 2. This sum represents the combined argument (expectation) *for* having a child. Similarly, when you put the expectations that argue *against* having the child with those that argue *for* not having the child you have the overall argument for deciding not to have the child.

The conceptual content of the questionnaire is based upon the author's four years of research on the factors that determine birth planning decisions. This research is reported, among other places, in:

Beach, L. R., Townes, B. D., Campbell, F. L., & Keating, G. W. Developing and testing a decision aid for birth planning decisions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance,* 1976, *15,* 99-116.

Townes, B. D., Campbell, F. L., Beach, L. R., & Martin, D. C. Birth-planning values and decisions: Preliminary findings. In S. H. Newman & V. D.Thompson (Eds.), *Population psychology: Research and educational issues.* Bethesda, Md.: DHEW, 1976.

Wood, R. J., Campbell, F. L., Townes, B. D., & Beach, L. R. Birth planning decisions. *American Journal of Public Health,* 1977, *67,* 563-565.

Scoring Procedure

Each item in the questionnaire has a boxed number. These are referred to as the *"item numbers."*

Step A: In Column A of the worksheet write a plus (+) if the client marked "for," or a minus (-) if he or she marked "against" for each item in the questionnaire. Note: Items 14, 15, 16, 23, 24, 29, 30, and 31 in Part 3 of the worksheet do not have signs: Ignore these items for the time being. We will return to them in Step E.

Step B: In Column B of the worksheet insert the number of points the client gave each item. Then convert these numbers to decimal numbers (e.g. *1 point becomes .1, 5 points becomes .5, 10 points becomes 1.00, etc.*). (If the client erred and the points within a section do not sum to 10, correction is possible by dividing each number he or she gave by the sum of the numbers for the section. These quotients will be decimal numbers suitable for use in Column B.)

Step C: In Column C of the questionnaire write a .9 if the client marked "very likely" for an item, a .5 if he or she marked "uncertain" or a .1 if he or she marked "very unlikely."

Step D: Multiply the decimal numbers in Column B by those in Column C and write the answer in Column D. Then transfer the signs from Column A and write them in front of the numbers in Column D. Note: The numbers in Column D will be two-place decimal numbers. Also, because anything multiplied by zero equals zero, any items with zero points in Column B drop out of consideration and no further calculations need be done with them.

Step E: Go to Part 3 of the worksheet (weights computations). In the first column insert the number of points the client gave to items 14, 15, 16, 23, 24, 29, 30, and 31. Then for items 14, 15, and 16 write the points for item 32 in the second column, for items 23 and 24 write the points for item 33 in the second column, and for items 29, 30, and 31 write the points for item 34 in the second column. Convert the numbers in both of these columns to decimal numbers as you did in Step B, then multiply the decimal numbers in the second column and write the products in the third column. Transfer these products, (again, two-place decimal numbers) to the appropriate spaces in Column E in the first part of the worksheet. That is, the weight labeled (a) which is the product of items 14 and 32 is to be inserted in Column E for items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The weight labeled (b) is inserted for items 6, 7, 8, and 9, etc.

Step F: Calculate the products of the numbers in Columns D and E for all of the numbers in Column D that have plus (+) signs. Write the products for these positive numbers in Column F. Sum these numbers down the column and write the total in the box at the bottom of Column F (omit the sign when you write the answer in the box).

Step G: Now do the same thing for all of the numbers in Column D that have negative (-) signs. Write these products in Column G and then sum them and write the total in the box in Column G (omit the sign when you write the answer in the box).

Step H: Next we turn to Part 2 of the worksheet. For every item that has a .9 in Column C, *divide* the number in Column F by 9.0 and place this number in Column H. For every item in Column F that has a .5 in Column C, simply *transfer* the signed product just as it is from Column F to Column H. For every item in Column F that has a .1 in Column C, *multiply* the signed product in Column F by 9.0 and place this number in Column H. Now go back and do the same thing for the numbers in Column G and place the answers in Column I.

Step I: Sum the numbers in Column H and write the total in the box at the bottom of the column (omit the sign when you write the sum in the box). Then, sum the numbers in Column I and write the total in the box at the bottom of that column (again, omit the sign when you write the sum in the box).

Balance Scale Computations

Step J: Transfer the numbers that are in the boxes at the bottoms of Columns F and H to the Final Computations section of Part 4 of the worksheet, sum them, and write the total in the dark-edged box.

Step K: Transfer the numbers that are in the boxes at the bottoms of Columns G and I to the Final Computations section of Part 4, sum them, and put the total in the dark-edged box.

Step L: To make sure no errors have crept into the calculations, check to make sure that the numbers in the two dark-edge boxes in Part 4 are both decimal numbers and that they add to 1.00 (within the limits of rounding error). If they do not add to 1.00 you have made an error in your computations.

Step M: Finally, turn to Part 5 of the worksheet and on the left-hand side of the scale find the box containing the number that is closest to the sum from Step J, and black it in. Do the same on the right-hand side of the scale for the sum from Step K.

Interpretation

The scale can be thought of as a balance beam or a teeter-totter and the blacked-in squares can be thought of as two equally heavy weights. If the two weights are equally far from the fulcrum the beam will not tip in either direction. If the distances are not equal the beam will tip in the direction of the weight that is furthest from the fulcrum. The greater the degree of imbalance the greater the strength of the tip in that direction.

The balance scale summarizes the answers given in the questionnaire. If the balance would tip to the left it is an indication that the answers tend to favor having the child. If the balance would tip to the right it is an indication that the answers tend to favor not having the child. The greater the degree of imbalance the greater the degree to which the answers tend to favor the dominant decision. If the balance would not tip in either direction or if the degree of imbalance is not very large, it is an indication that the answers in the questionnaire do not clearly favor either having or not having the child.

Overriding Considerations

Research shows that the following are more important than the results of this questionnaire in making birth planning decisions:

1. People who already have the number of children that they want for their family seldom decide to have another child. Only when the balance scale is very heavily tipped toward having another child do these people seriously think about doing so.
2. People whose balance scale is either not tipped at all or is only weakly tipped often delay their decision until they feel more strongly one way or another. Then they go through the decision process again.
3. People who have problems in their lives (financial problems, uncertain employment, marital difficulties, ill health, unfinished educational or training programs, etc.) frequently delay having a child until these things are resolved, whereupon they go through the decision process again.
4. People who find that they and their partner have balance scales that tip in opposite directions often postpone making a decision until the differences can be discussed and worked out. Talking together using this questionnaire as a guide for directing the discussion can be helpful.

Profile Computations

Step N: Move the decimal points in the numbers in Columns F and G two places to the right (e.g., .0032 becomes .32). Then plot them on the Profile on the last page of the questionnaire; the numbers in Column F go in the upper part of the Profile (above zero) and those in Column G go in the lower half (moving the decimal point is merely to avoid having to graph very small numbers; the numbers still remain in the same relationship to one another and that is what is important. If moving the decimal two places to the right still leaves you with a preponderance of small numbers, try moving it three places - but whatever you decide, do it to *all* of the numbers in both columns, not just to some. Note also that the number scale on the Profile may not be appropriate for your client's particular numbers. It is reasonable to change the scale in order to get a clear, meaningful Profile.)

Step O: Connect adjacent points on the Profile using a straightedge. Be careful to get every point in order as you go from left to right. Sometimes your line will go above the zero line, sometimes it will cross below. Items for which you have no answer (the client omitted them or gave them no points) should be plotted as zero.

Interpretation

The Profile shows the relative contributions of the various items to the results illustrated by the Balance Scale. Items that are very high on the graph argue most strongly for having a (another) child and items that are very low on the graph argue most strongly against doing so. Items with points near the zero line signify indifference or ambivalence.

The Profile serves two purposes. First, the counselor and client can use it to explore further the client's feelings about both the positiveness or negativeness of the consequences represented by the various items as well as feelings about the likelihood of these consequences occurring should the client decide to have the child. To a discerning counselor the profile can help in the identification of unrealistic feelings either because of lack of information, because of inaccurate information, or because of individual characteristics of the client. Each of these possibilities may require further exploration and examination.

The second purpose of the Profile is to permit comparison of partners' views about the relative contributions of the various items. This can serve as a basis for useful communication about the similarities and differences in their views and, perhaps, for clarification of those areas that require further mutual examination and understanding.